

# Nutrition needed for all children



## R. Gopinath

In yet another achievement of Tamil Nadu, the 'Chief Minister's breakfast' scheme is set to come into effect on September 15. In the first phase, this scheme will benefit 1,14,095 primary school children spread over 1,545 selected schools. The breakfast for school children scheme has already been in existence in a few states and in Puduchery as well. But under the scheme, only milk, some fruits and bread are supplied. This scheme is implemented through private companies at some places.

## TN a pioneer

The breakfast for school children scheme aims to cure the children of anaemia and nutritional deficiency and also to ensure their presence in the schools without feeling hungry. The Tamil Nadu government has issued a set of guidelines on supply of cooked food to the children for five days a week in order to eliminate their nutritional deficiency. Through this scheme, Tamil Nadu has proved itself as a pioneering state.

In the first phase of the scheme, the Tamil Nadu government has allotted Rs.33.56 crore. Though the 'breakfast for school children'

scheme is introduced as part of the New Education Policy, the union government's Finance Ministry had rejected the proposal for the scheme, citing funds crunch. But the Tamil Nadu government, unfazed by this rejection, has gone ahead with the scheme, relying on itself for funds and despite heavy liabilities. A year down the line, the state government will do well to study the operation of the scheme and come up with a report that will be an example worth emulating by other states. It is to be recalled here that it was Tamil Nadu's pioneering experience and experiment that led to the introduction of noon meal scheme all over India.

### **Researches needed**

The Government Order has said that this scheme will be considered for expansion down the line only on the basis of data and studies of the scheme. The researches will cover how the children react to the menu, what are the procedural and practical problems in procuring the cooking inputs and also what are the methods of using cereals available here and there.

The local bodies have been entrusted with the job of preparing breakfast and serving it to the students. While the noon meal scheme is being implemented by the Social Welfare Department, it has been informed that the breakfast scheme will be implemented through the local bodies in primary schools. A detailed analytical report is needed in this regard. How the local bodies implement the breakfast scheme, assimilating it should also be studied because the research will help the local bodies coordinate with the women farmer groups (at some places) functioning in village wards, procure veggies and cereals through them and add them to the breakfast menu. The government must inform when and how these studies will be undertaken. The transparency of the scheme will be ensured by disclosing the methods of data collection and research as mentioned in the Government Order.

### **Nutrition needed**

It is absolutely necessary to ensure that all school children get nutritional food. The National Family Health Survey-5 has revealed that 27.1 per cent of children below five years are deficient in growth (lack of height in proportion to age) and 57.4 per cent of them are anaemic. The surveys held at various points of time in various places including Tamil Nadu have brought to light the fact that there is lack of equality in nutrition among all economic classes.

The data given out by the government have clearly shown that in Tamil Nadu, almost half of the children population are studying in the private schools. So, it is obvious that 50 per cent of children have enrolled in the government and government-aided schools. In order to eliminate the nutritional deficiency of school-going children, it is imperative to ensure that all school children get nutrition-rich food. In the event, ways and means should be mulled to ensure that the children in the government-aided schools, too, get nutritional food.

The 'Samacheer Kalvi' (Equitable Education) scheme was brought in with the long-term vision of a uniform educational system for all school children. Similarly, in a few private colleges, noon meal is provided to students (hostel inmates and day scholars). All this has demonstrated the possibility of providing nutritional food to students even in private schools. It can be made possible through the centralized kitchens. In this context, an interactive dialogue is needed to discuss the ways and means of ensuring standard menu through government guidelines and augmenting financial resources required for the scheme of nutritional food for students. Hence, in order to create a future generation of children who have equality in terms of nutrition, it is necessary to ensure that the present generation of school children take nutritionally rich food. It is all the more necessary to collect standard data and undertake qualitative researches in this regard so this experience will be a benchmark for other states.

**R. Gopinath of M. S. Swaminathan Research Institute. For  
contact: gopidina@gmail.com**

**Translated by V. Mariappan**